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each packet containing pearls of the same class, but not necessarily of the same size—the ingenuity of the dealer finds further scope, for each of such packets, if skilfully made up, commands a higher price than the pearls comprising it would obtain if disposed of separately. Dealers are consequently averse from breaking up their packets and a fancy price must generally be paid for a single pearl selected from a packet of which the remainder are not taken.

The sheikhs of the Arab littoral derive considerable revenue from the pearl fisheries, but only as a means of taxes imposed on their subjects or on traders resident in their territories. The Trucial Oman sheikhs are also entitled to receive a share in the sale price of any pearl worth £50 or more which may have been found by one of their subjects, but no particular share is specified. The tax is called *Taraz*, and is sometimes assessed at the rate of one diver's share for each boat, and the sheikh is supposed to provide out of this revenue the services of watchmen to guard the towns and villages while the able-bodied males are absent. The *Taraz* is a poll tax on operatives and the *Nob*, also collected by the sheikhs, a tax on boats. Much confusion is caused by irregularity in collection of the taxes, the people always endeavouring to pay as little as possible and the sheikhs to take as much as they can, and that in advance. It is not surprising that the profession of tax-collector is highly unpopular in Arabia.

The rights of the pearl fisheries are very jealously guarded and the operatives are protected by the British Government. Only Arabs and the subjects of the sheikhs are allowed to undertake pearl diving in the Persian Gulf, and foreigners, diving suits, and any form of mechanical device are strictly barred. The effect of competition with Europeans furnished with scientific appliances and the use of deep-sea dredging, would tend to destroy the colonies from which the oysters upon the shallow beds accessible to native divers are recruited. Moreover, the appearance of European rivals would arouse great animosity on the part of the Arabs, who regard the fisheries as their common but exclusive inheritance, and for this reason alone the British Government has always opposed foreign entry—even that of British subjects—into the Gulf pearling industry.

In spite of Government opposition, however, the lure of the pearl trade has proved too great to prevent attempts by foreigners to compete in the industry, and several syndicates have been formed in the past with a view to exploiting the beds. Permission to

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operate has been refused in every case, and ships which have ventured into the Gulf with the object of sending down divers in secret, have been impounded and their takings, if any, confiscated. In 1882 a steamer, the *Johnstone Castle*, was chartered by a Bombay syndicate and proceeded without official sanction to the Bahrain pearl banks. News of the expedition soon reached the Political Resident at Bushire, and he despatched a Government vessel to arrest the steamer. The total gains of the party during the five days that they had been at work were represented by only twenty-three small seed pearls.

Numerous abortive attempts to work the beds with modern diving apparatus have been made since then, and in 1900 an Indian merchant actually had a trading agreement with the Sheikhs of Abu Dhabi and Ras-al-Khaimah to operate in their territories, but the British authorities cancelled the arrangement on the grounds that it would arouse hostility amongst the pearling community. A year later the *Selika*, a small Belgian steam yacht, paid a visit to the Gulf. After leaving Muscat she disappeared for several weeks, reappearing suddenly at Bahrain. The crew admitted that they had spent most of the time in the neighbourhood of the pearl banks, and it was afterwards ascertained that on their return to Europe they had disposed of a quantity of small pearls.

In the same year the *Daily Express* announced that an influential German syndicate were negotiating with the Turkish 'Porte' for a monopoly of the pearl fisheries along the Ottoman shores of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, with a view to working them by scientific methods. The British Ambassador at Constantinople took the matter up with the Turkish Government, who denied all knowledge of the negotiations, and nothing further was heard of the syndicate or their scheme. In more recent years the Sponge Exploration Syndicate Limited, a company with a nominal capital of £1,000, registered in London, but directed chiefly by foreigners of various nationalities, attempted to exploit the beds. This company, which described its business as that of 'sponge, pearl and coral finders', unsuccessfully tried to obtain sanction from the Foreign Office to fish in the Gulf.

No assistance was given to them, but they succeeded in procuring a fifty years' concession and monopoly for sponge fishing in Persian waters. Under this authority some diving was carried on by Greek employees of the syndicate.

Prior to the 1914–18 war a Parisian jeweller, Madame Nattan,

228 477 came to Bahrain for the pearl season and remained there from the beginning of August until the end of October. She had some difficulty in establishing relations with the local dealers, who were prejudiced against carrying on business with a woman, but eventually she succeeded in buying pearls on the spot to the amount of 40,000 rupees (£3,000).

442 181 There is nothing to prevent anyone going to the Persian Gulf and buying pearls from the dealers, but there is very little likelihood that he will make a profit out of the transaction. The Arab is an extremely wily person and unless the greenhorn is lucky enough to obtain the friendly advice of an honest merchant, such as Hassan bin Ahmidfa he will, as likely as not, find himself saddled with rubbish. A life-study of pearls is necessary in order to be able to appraise their value, and even a Hatton Garden merchant who paid a visit to Bahrain or Sharjah would have to know something of the Arab character as well as of pearls. A woman singer who came to Sharjah with a concert party showed me a pearl necklace she had purchased in Bahrain; she told me she had paid £25 for it and seemed overjoyed with her 'bargain'. She lent the pearls to me to have them valued locally, and I showed them to Hassan. He eyed them with a look of contempt and handed them back.

'*Singabasi*,' he muttered, an Arabic word used to signify the bluish pearls of low value which have the silvery sheen of ball bearings. 'They are worth perhaps thirty rupees.'